

# **THE FIRST GASOLINE POWERED AUTOMOBILE OF UTAH WAS BUILT IN LEHI**

Automobile revolution changed the way we live

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No disaster, depression, or war had as much impact on American manners and morals as the automobile revolution.

Charles and Frank Duryea built the first successful American gasoline-powered car in the early 1890's. Henry Ford, Charles Brady King, Branson Eli Ola, and Alexander Winton introduced their internal-combustion-driven vehicles in 1896.

In 1901, Olds initiated the mass production of cars in the United States by building 425 vehicles. but these early autos were so expensive that only the rich could afford them. In 1913, Henry Ford introduced a moving assembly line in his factory, The following year he was able to turnout a Model T in little more than ninety minutes; previously it had taken 12- and-a-half hours.

The time savings cut production costs to the point that 1916 Model T's could be profitably sold for less than \$400--the lowest price of any automobile. From 1908 to 1927 more than half the automobiles sold in America were Fords.

Lehi's earliest automobile, hand built by local native John Devey, was also the first gasoline-powered conveyance in Utah.

Devey, an Alpine native, who became chief mechanic at the Lehi Sugar Factory in the 1890's received his early vocational training from his father. For

years the two men supplied ZCMI with harness rings, wheelbarrows, picks and other other items made of iron.

This clever duo built one of the first hay balers in Utah: LDS Church President John Taylor made a special trip just to watch it work.

When Devey moved to Lehi he established residence at 91 East Main, which was then the former blacksmith shop of Samuel R. Taylor. As he became more prosperous he built the fine home on that site which is now occupied by Roy and Lois Littleford.

Lehi residence were keenly aware of Devey's mechanical genius. He had invented a fountain pen, screwtop bottle, hay baler, smoke consumer and beet topper. Hearing of the new-fangled horseless carriage, Devey went to Salt Lake City in 1899 to examine the three Silver Brother's steam-propelled buggies, Utah's first automobiles.

Like other pragmatic men, Devey correctly observed that the steam cars were impractical. He set out to built in his own shop a vehicle powered by a two-cylinder internal combustion engine, which did not require a fire beneath the seat to get up a sufficient head of steam.

Local citizens were astonished in May of 1900 to see the local wizard putt-putting about town in his horseless carriage. The converted buggy was capable of generating the seemingly incredible speed of twenty miles per hour (on level ground).

Evan L. Colledge, Sr. remembered that the vehicle had "high wooden wheels (for crossing irrigation ditches) and a small narrow hard rubber tire around each wheel. This car had kerosene lamps and when he would drive it along the road everybody went out to see it go by and to wave at him. It was really something in those days."

Though Devey's car had insufficient power to climb much of a grade, by 1915 automobiles were considerably more efficient. Lehi's Main Street was transformed into a "speedway for autos." the local paper noted. During a July 6, 1915 meeting, the Lehi City Council passed the town's first speeding regulation. Drivers were not to exceed "eight miles per hour in crossing any street or intersection thereof or at a greater speed than fifteen miles per hour on any other part of a street."

While John Devey's historic vehicle was slowly deteriorating at the home of his daughter Alice D. Hutchings, mass produced automobiles began to appear on Lehi streets.

The first vehicle after Devey's was John F. Bradshaw's black Cadillac. The wealthy citizen's car was the most expensive vehicle available and attracted more attention everywhere it went. The car had a double reduction rear end with six forward gears and two reverse.

New cars in town like the Bradshaw's were announced in the "lehi Banner" with as much fanfare as the birth of a baby or the marriage of a well-known couple. Unlike long-lasting wagons and bugles, however, the newfangled cars needed regular service and gasoline.

"An old gas station may say more about us as a nation than a house of a former president" claims Mike Jackson, president of the Society for Commercial Archeology. The memorabil icons of a red winged horse (Sybici) a long-necked brontosaurus (Sinclair) and a clamshell (Shell) are pure Americana.

Lehi's earliest service stations and garages were located on State Street to take advantage of the ever increasing automobile traffic on Utah's major roadway. The People's Co-op was the first place in town where drivers could "fill 'er up". In March 1916 the Mercantile installed two six-hundred gallon gas tanks and a pump in

front of the store. An early photo shows the hand-operated pump-a gangly looking contraption with a large glass reservoir on top.

Although automobiles were initially considered an expensive luxury or a rich man's toy, they have literally revolutionized the world we live in.

Most Lehi citizens drive outside the community to work. Whereas people in the nineteenth century walked (and were healthier for it), we now drive even if our destination is only a few blocks away. We, along with the rest of the country, now drive about 1.7 trillion miles a year, burning up in the process approximately 116 billion gallons of gasoline, an unrenewable resource.

Whereas nearly 90 years ago, John Devey's horseless carriage once shared Lehi streets solely with oatburners, Main Street on one of those "there's nothin' to do" summer nights is now a "cruising" promenade of seemingly endless vehicles-a service station owner's dream come true.